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Summer Food Service Program is here to help

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Montana No Kid Hungry

This time of year in Montana, children are getting excited for opportunities that summer will bring to them. Unfortunately, the reality is that many children and teenagers in Montana aren't full of that same zest for the summer because the end of school means lost access to daily scheduled healthy meals.

Fortunately, the Summer Food Service Program is available to fill a much-needed void. This is a free program that offers meals to all children and teens age 18 and younger at over 120 locations throughout Montana. Many sites also offer recreational and social activities for children. There is no application process or lengthy paperwork, all you have to do is show up and eat! To find the meal location nearest you, text "lunch" to 877-877 or visit www.mfbn.org/summerfoodmt to view the Summer Meals Map with all the locations and contact information.

This programs' success has helped, but still more work remains.

Currently in Montana, 1 in 5 children live in families who are struggling to put food on the table. This is over 45,000 children. This number may surprise many people who feel as though Montana is a fairly food secure state.

In order to solve this problem, Montana No Kid Hungry was launched to connect kids to healthy food. We help families find food assistance programs and community resources. The program also places a heavy focus on nutrition education and empowering families to shop for healthy food in a grocery store while on a budget. Improving access to community and statewide child nutrition programs, paired with nutrition education, paves way for all families to live healthier, happier, longer lives, and ensures bright futures for Montana's children.

The implications of hunger are dramatic for children during their developmental years. Consider these facts:

- Hunger and inconsistent nutrition leads to inadequacy of vital nutrients, reduced immunity, increased risk of infections, morbidity, incidence of chronic disease, and poor eating behaviors.

- In Montana, approximately 25 percent of children ages 10-17 are overweight or obese. Hunger increases risk of overweight and obesity due to the chronic ups and downs in their diet, and the consumption of energy dense foods rather than nutrient dense foods.
- Children who are food insecure have lower math and reading scores, reduced ability for memory, language, motor skills, social interaction, and have increased grade repetition, tardiness, anxiety, aggression, and behavior problems in class.

There is a clear economic impact on schools, families, public health and the future workforce in the state.

- Poor academic outcomes lead to high school dropouts, lack of higher education, lack of skills to seek better employment opportunities and gain economic self-sufficiency in adulthood. This often creates higher health care costs, lost work time for parents, and risk of job loss.

Want to help solve this crisis? Visit <http://mt.nokidhungry.org/forms/get-involved> and view the Take Action Center to find several actions you can take to help fight childhood hunger here in Montana.

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